

Summary  
**MONTANA WETLAND COUNCIL MEETING**  
**Wednesday May 30, 2012.**

**Energy Development and Agriculture: Wetland and Riparian Issues**  
**Affecting Central and Eastern Montana.**

Calvert Hotel Large Meeting Room  
Lewistown, Montana

(\*Tuesday May 29, 2012 wetland tour and Society of Wetland Scientists speaker series 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm)

**8:45 am. Gather for Coffee and Conversation with Colleagues.**

**9:00 am. Welcome and Introductions.**

**Lynda Saul**, *DEQ Wetland Program Coordinator/Wetland Council Chair.*

Lynda welcomed participants and thanked everyone for meeting in the geographic center of the state. She pointed out that in the past 15 years of leading the Montana Wetland Council this was the first meeting to be held outside Helena. Based on the impressive turnout, the Council will be meeting outside Helena more often. Let Lynda know if you would like the Council to meet in your area. About 70 people attended the meeting in Lewistown, please see attached sign-in sheet.

Lynda also made a few announcements including acknowledging Tim Swanson, recently retired from The Nature Conservancy, for being awarded the National Wetland Award in Washington D.C. for Conservation and Restoration for his tireless work bringing divergent interests to the table in order to protect land threatened with development in southwest Montana. His work has helped to protect almost 70,000 acres of land, including over 11,000 acres of critical wetland habitat. The Council was involved in nominating Tim for the national award. Pictures and details of the national award are posted here <http://www.nationalwetlandsawards.org/>

Due to the packed agenda, the Council bypassed participant announcements and instead Lynda encouraged attendees to send announcements to be added to this summary, please see last page.

Bob Sanders, Ducks Unlimited, Inc facilitated the morning panel and discussion.

**9:15 am. PANEL - Eastern Montana Wetlands, Grasslands and Agriculture**

Continued losses of grassland and wetland complexes in eastern Montana have underscored the need for expanded efforts to conserve these habitats on both public and private lands. This session will highlight recent advances in GIS technology that serve to identify high priority landscapes for waterfowl species, describe the various state and federal programs that are available to assist landowners in conserving wildlife habitats and provide first-hand examples of how these programs have been implemented in eastern Montana.

- [Identifying Wetland Protection Opportunities: The "Thunderstorm Map" Approach](#) - Sean Fields, USFWS
- [Working Outside the "Blue Goose" signs](#) - Todd Boonstra and [Jim Stutzman](#), USFWS Wetland Management Districts
- [Ensuring a future for Agriculture and Wildlife](#) - Danielle Kepford, USFWS Realty
- [The Migratory Bird Stamp Program and Other Opportunities](#) - Scott Thompson and Jim Hansen, MT FWP
- [Land Protection in Action: The Ducks Unlimited Experience](#) - Bob Sanders, Ducks Unlimited, Inc

**10:45 am. PANEL - USDA Programs at Work in Eastern Montana**

Loss of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands, breaking of native prairie and the loss and degradation of wetlands in eastern Montana are just a few of the challenges facing wildlife populations in this region. This session will describe these trends and provide information on programs available to landowners to offset these losses while providing economic stability for their agricultural operations.

- [NRCS Farm Bill Programs: Where Have We Been and What Does the Future Hold for Eastern Montana?](#) Tim Oullette, NRCS
- [The Conservation Reserve Program: Status, Trends and Future Outlook](#) - Amy Webbink, FSA
- [The Wetland Reserve Program: The Farm Bill in Action](#) - Abby Rokosch, Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

**11:30 am. Round Table Discussion**

## **Noon - LUNCH catered by Calvert Hotel Onyx Grill**

### **Lunch speaker - [Analysis of Riparian Integrity along the Large Rivers of Eastern Montana.](#)**

*Linda Vance, Montana Natural Heritage Program*

The rich river valley bottoms of Eastern Montana have long been a magnet for human settlement and agricultural development. Over the years, human land uses have contributed to shrinking riparian forests, a loss of shrub-scrub habitat, and a growing presence for exotic and invasive species. Montana Natural Heritage Program ecologists and GIS analysts have been developing a method for assessing these patterns using aerial imagery and classification tools. This presentation will give a brief overview of the approach, and then will discuss the results and implications for riparian-dependent species.

## **Afternoon Focus – Energy Development**

### **1:10 pm. [Lessons learned about the value of water monitoring around coalbed methane development in southeast Montana.](#)**

*Elizabeth Meredith, Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology*

Production of coalbed methane in southeastern Montana requires the removal and disposal of large quantities of groundwater from locally important aquifers. Removing groundwater has the potential of impacting stock and domestic wells and reducing flow of local springs and streams. The water is naturally very high in sodium and surface disposal could alter soils structure. CBM production began in 1999 and at that time severe impacts were anticipated that included drawdown of up to 10 feet for 10 miles around the development areas, and reduced discharge from springs. After 13 years of monitoring, the actual impacts include drawdown of 10 feet no further than 3 miles from development, no documented reduction in spring flows and limited salinization. Third-party monitoring of hundreds of wells and springs by the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology has produced these valuable results which are published as annual updates and have allowed improved decision making and working relationships between stakeholders.

### **1:40 [Brine contamination to Prairie Potholes from Energy Development in the Williston basin.](#)**

*Joanna Thamke, USGS and Todd Preston, USGS contractor.*

The central portion of the Prairie Pothole Region, a wetland-rich area that is critical to North America's migratory waterfowl, overlies oil-rich formations of the Williston basin. Substantial volumes of brine have been co-produced with oil contaminating the potholes and connected groundwater. Using a contamination index developed by Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology and enhanced by USGS, wetlands can be rapidly assessed for brine contamination by using a ratio of field chloride to specific conductance. While there might be variations in other parts of the Williston basin, a water contamination index greater than 0.035 in Sheridan County, Montana is a predictor of brine contamination. Factors such as the age and number of nearby oil wells, proximity of oil wells to wetlands and streams, and presence of coarse outwash deposits that hydraulically move contaminants at greater rates can increase a wetland's vulnerability to brine contamination. Brine contamination can persist in the glacial deposits for at least several decades. Additional details about this work are available on the project web page: <http://steppe.cr.usgs.gov/>

### **2:20 [Oil exploration and development on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation: Working for protection in the oncoming rush of energy development.](#)**

*Jeanne Spaur, Fort Peck Tribe*

After years of unfulfilled energy development potential on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, the recent developments of diagonal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," have now made it possible to access the several hundred million barrels of oil estimated to be trapped under the reservation in the "unconventional" Bakken formation. The controversial fracking process forces a highly pressurized injection of water, sand, and chemicals into the hard shale formation, fracturing the shale and releasing the flow of oil and gas into the well bore. While the Tribes recognize the economic importance of energy exploration and development, they also take great pride in being good stewards of reservation cultural and natural resources. This presentation will discuss our development of energy development best management practices to protect these resources while not prohibiting energy exploration and development.

### **3:00 [Wetland and Riparian Ecosystems and the Effects of Energy Development and Associated Rural Expansion on Regional Water Resources in NE Montana.](#)**

*Duncan Patten, Montana Water Center, Montana State University*

Expansion of energy development in NE Montana may greatly affect the quantity and quality of water resources available in that region. Each phase of the water life cycle through the hydraulic fracturing (fracking) process may influence water availability and/or quality for the human and natural systems that depend on this resource. Fracking consumes large quantities of water, especially relative to water availability in semi-arid NE Montana, and expanding human needs may exacerbate these demands. Water sources for fracking and humans include surface and ground water, both necessary for maintenance of wetlands and riparian areas, as well as agriculture. Fracking also produces large quantities of low quality water, a treatment and disposal problem. A description of the interconnections among the various uses of water and natural processes in semi-arid NE Montana will demonstrate a complex resource management system that needs to be understood in order to sustain the natural water-oriented systems in this region.

### **3:30 Round Table Discussion and Closing Remarks**

An additional PowerPoint presentation provides more information about [fracturing and oil and gas development](#) and water resource issues. Joe Meek, MDEQ Source Water Protection Section Supervisor.

### **4:00 Adjourn**

The Montana Wetland Council meets three times a year and is an active network of diverse interests that works cooperatively to conserve and restore Montana's wetland and riparian ecosystems by implementing Montana's Wetland Plan. Everyone is welcome to attend. For additional information contact Lynda Saul, Montana DEQ, (406) 444-6652 or [lsaul@mt.gov](mailto:lsaul@mt.gov). Website: [Montana Wetland Clearinghouse](#)

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### **\* Montana Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society of Wetland Scientists 3<sup>rd</sup> Speaker Series May 29<sup>th</sup> in Lewistown, MT**

The Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society of Wetland Scientists held its 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting with a series of presentations and discussions on wetlands in Montana. The event began with a walking tour of the Brewery Flats wetland restoration project led by Ted Hawn with the Big Spring Creek Watershed Group. To learn more about the Brewery Flats restoration project visit <http://fwp.mt.gov/mtoutdoors/HTML/articles/2002/breweryflats.htm>.

At the Calvert, three 15-minute presentations were followed by dinner and a social hour. The presentations included one from each of three general themes: regulatory/government, research/ academia, and special interest. Speakers included:

[Todd Preston](#), U.S. Geological Service, who discussed work on brine contamination in Montana's prairie potholes.  
[Ted Hawn](#), Coordinator for the Big Spring Creek Watershed Group, who presented management tools used by the watershed group.

[Duncan Patten](#), MSU Water Center, provided an overview of recent graduate student research on wetland and riparian projects at MSU.

To learn more about the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society of Wetland Scientists, please visit the website at <http://www.sws.org/regional/rockymountain/>. The SWS events were organized by Catherine McIntyre, [catmcintyre@yahoo.com](mailto:catmcintyre@yahoo.com), Secretary, Rocky Mountain Chapter SWS. Thanks Cat!

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### **Other Announcements:**

The BLM will be hosting a free riparian monitoring training in Butte July 30- August 1<sup>st</sup>. The training will introduce the Multiple Indicator Monitoring (MIM) method which monitors conditions and trends in vegetative, morphological, and use indicators. This method is the primary monitoring suite used by BLM across the western United States. Space is limited to 30 attendees with non-BLM slots being offered on a first come first served basis. Please submit your nomination to Mike Philbin (406-896-5041; [mphilbin@blm.gov](mailto:mphilbin@blm.gov)) by July 6. This is a technically intensive class. Participants will benefit by reviewing the MIM protocol document prior to the workshop. A downloadable copy of the MIM Technical Reference is available at <http://www.rmsmim.com>.

**Biographies and Contact Information.**  
**May 2012 Montana Wetland Council meeting in Lewistown.**

**Todd Boonstra** is serving as the assistant manager at the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge in Malta, Montana. Todd is also the district manager for the Bowdoin Wetland Management District. The Bowdoin Wetland Management District spreads across a four-county area in north-central Montana and encompasses four satellite refuges, seven waterfowl production areas, and USFWS grassland & wetland easements. Todd has been with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the past five years and recently joined the Bowdoin NWR from South Dakota in the fall of 2010.

Todd Boonstra, Assistant Refuge Manager, Bowdoin NWR  
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**Sean Fields** is a wildlife biologist with the USFWS Region 6 Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) in Great Falls, MT. Fields earned his A.A. degree in Natural Resource Management from Sterling College, B.S. degree in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana, and M.S. degree in Biological Sciences at Montana State University. Currently, he is focusing on waterfowl and shorebird population ecology in the Prairie Pothole Region of Montana. In addition to waterfowl biology, Fields specialize in applying spatial science and geographic information systems to solve wildlife management issues at landscape scales.

Sean Fields, Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
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**Jim Hansen** grew up on a farm in northern Minnesota, where it was natural to develop an interest in wildlife. He got a B.S. degree in Fish and Wildlife Management from the University of Minnesota and an M.A. degree in Zoology from the University of Missouri, where he worked on a wood duck nest box study for his degree project. He has worked for the National Audubon Society in Florida as a biologist studying wood storks, as a wildlife planner for the Minnesota DNR, and as a waterfowl biologist and nongame biologist for the Iowa DNR. For the last 21 years he has been the Central Flyway Migratory Bird Coordinator for Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, stationed in Billings. He has a strong interest in wetlands and the critters that live in them, plus an interest in working with private landowners and other partners on wetlands.

Jim Hansen, Central Flyway Migratory Bird Coordinator, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks  
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**Danielle Kepford** grew up in Everly, Iowa and graduated with an Associate of Science Degree in Biology from Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls. She received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, minors in Zoology and Chemistry from South Dakota State University in Brookings, South Dakota.

In June 1999, Danielle was offered a Realty Specialist trainee position in Huron, South Dakota in the Wetland Acquisition Office. She started working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in July 1999, mainly acquiring wetland and grassland easements. She worked in eastern South Dakota until September 2001. In August 2001, Danielle was offered a Realty Specialist position at the Benton Lake Acquisition Office, located north of Great Falls, Montana on Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and continued to acquire wetland and grassland easements, but also worked more on fee title acquisitions. Her main focus was the Hi-Line, but also Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. Danielle was transferred to Lewistown MT in 2004 to focus on the CMR Enhancement Act, which allows the Federal Government to divest of 392+ cabin leases on Fort Peck Lake. Danielle is still a Realty Specialist with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and continues to acquire wetland and grassland easements on the Hi-Line.

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**Dr. Elizabeth Meredith** received her doctoral degree from the University of Wyoming in Hydrogeochemistry in 2007. Currently she is the manager of the Coal and Coalbed Methane Monitoring Program at the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology. Elizabeth also works on various groundwater issues across Montana, with an emphasis in the southeast. A list of publications is available at <http://www.mbmgs.mtech.edu/>.

Elizabeth Meredith, Hydrogeologist, Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology  
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#### **Tim Ouellette**

Present Position: Assistant State Conservationist for Programs.  
Years of Service: 33 years with NRCS  
Locations with NRCS: Kansas, Idaho Montana and Colorado  
Positions Held with NRCS: Range Conservationist, District Conservationist, Area Rangeland Management Specialist, Area Resource Conservationist, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations and Assistant State Conservationist for Programs  
Education: BS in Range Management from New Mexico State University

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**Todd Preston**, Research Associate with Parallel Inc. United States Geological Survey,  
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**Dr. Duncan Patten** is Research Professor with the Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences and Director of the Montana Water Center at Montana State University, Bozeman. He is also Professor Emeritus in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. Dr. Patten holds an A.B. from Amherst College, an M.S. from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and a Ph.D. from Duke University. His research interests include arid and mountain ecosystems, especially the understanding of ecological processes of watersheds, and riparian, wetland, and riverine ecosystems. He served as Senior Scientist of the Bureau of Reclamation's Glen Canyon Environmental Studies, overseeing the research program evaluating effects of operations of Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River riverine ecosystem. Dr. Patten was president of the Society of Wetland Scientists, and Business Manager of the Ecological Society of America. He is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Among other national activities, he presently serves on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Science Advisory Board.

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**Abby Rokosch** is one of Ducks Unlimited's Conservation Specialists in Montana. Abby's primary role is to provide technical and programmatic assistance to the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help promote and deliver the Wetlands Reserve Program. Abby's background includes a B.S. in Biology and an M.S. in Environmental Science with a focus in wetland ecology as well as 9 years of experience working in wetland and riparian ecosystems. Abby works with private landowners across the state to protect and restore Montana's wetlands.



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**Bob Sanders** is Ducks Unlimited's Manager of Conservation Programs here in Montana. Bob has been with Ducks Unlimited for 17 years and is currently stationed in Elliston, Montana. He handles all aspects of DU's Montana conservation program including wetland restoration, grassland and wetland protection and public policy work. Bob's background includes a B.S and M.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries as well as over 22 years of experience in wetland and waterfowl ecology throughout the Rocky Mountain region. Bob believes strongly in the practical application of science and technology to deliver on-the-ground conservation objectives.

Robert L. Sanders, Manager of Conservation Programs – Montana, Ducks Unlimited, Inc.  
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**Lynda Saul** is the Montana Wetland Program Coordinator at the Department of Environmental Quality. The DEQ Wetland Program provides state leadership to conserve wetlands for their water quality, water quantity, habitat, and flood control benefits. She leads the state-wide Montana Wetland Council to increase the protection of Montana's wetlands through scientific rigor, enhanced coordination, and regulatory and non-regulatory approaches. Saul received the 2007 National Wetland Award in Washington D.C. for building and implementing a strong state wetland program. She began working on wetland protection in 1997 and on water and natural resource issues for Montana state government in 1986 including hydropower relicensing, federal reserved water rights, and watershed planning. Saul has a BS in Geology from Tulane University and a MS in Forest Hydrology from the University of Montana and is a Professional Wetland Scientist and Certified Floodplain Manager.

Lynda A. Saul, PWS, CFM, Wetland Program Coordinator, MT Department of Environmental Quality  
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**Jeanne Spaur** has been the project coordinator and wildlife biologist for the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes since 2007. She earned a MS in Natural Resource Ecology and Management with a wildlife management focus and a BS in Animal Ecology with a minor in American Indian Studies from Iowa State University. Jeanne's graduate research involved exploring community member's thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs regarding *Pispiza* (black-tailed prairie dog) on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. Jeanne manages the Manning Lake Wetlands Tribal Wildlife Refuge, the wetland and non-point source water pollution programs, and is the Tribal Sub-committee's co-point of contact for the Missouri River Restoration Committee. Current projects include energy development impact analysis and mitigation efforts, determining Manning Lake wetland complex hydrologic functionality, reservation wide small vertebrate diversity monitoring, and securing management opportunities within the Refuge.

Jeanne Spaur, project coordinator and wildlife biologist  
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**Jim Stutzman** has been working for the MT PFW Program since 1987 and became the State Coordinator in 1989. The PFW Program provides financial and technical assistance to landowners to implement habitat restoration, enhancement and management projects on private lands. Project examples include but are not limited to; wetland restoration, stream/riparian restoration, upland enhancement through grazing systems, invasive species management, fish passage and conflict abatement between livestock producers and large carnivores.

Robust partnerships with landowners, agencies and NGO's are the cornerstone of the program. We typically leverage each federal dollar with five non-federal dollars. The PFW Program embraces community-based, landscape-level conservation in key conservation focus areas across Montana. We believe in locally-led, homegrown conservation solutions.

Jim Stutzman, State Coordinator, Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program;  
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**Joanna Thamke** is the Groundwater Specialist at the USGS Montana Water Science Center and has worked on groundwater projects in the Williston basin for nearly 25 years. **Todd Preston** is a hydrologist/GIS analyst working as a contractor for the USGS Northern Rocky Mountain Science Center and has worked on groundwater projects in Eastern Montana for about 5 years. Joanna and Todd are part of the Science Team about Energy and Prairie Pothole Environments (STEPPE) that is in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of assessing brine contamination to shallow water and aquatic resources in the Prairie Pothole Region and the Williston basin.

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**Scott Thompson** graduated from the MSU range department with the goal of applying habitat management to wildlife management. Works across Phillips County with a focus on habitat conservation and improvement, free public hunting access, and game species management. Enjoys using our great resources including hunting, fishing and baiting hooks for my 3 boys.

Scott Thompson, Malta Area Wildlife Biologist, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks  
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**Dr. Linda Vance** is the Senior Ecologist and Director of the Spatial Analysis Lab for the Montana Natural Heritage Program. She has a Ph.D in Conservation Ecology from the University of California, Davis. Her work with MTNHP involves classification, description, mapping and modeling of land cover; development of GIS-based tools for landscape-level assessment; and refinement of field-based protocols for wetland, riparian, and terrestrial integrity evaluation and monitoring. Her current projects include a GIS-based decision support tool for Region 1 of the Forest Service; a statewide analysis of riparian condition along large rivers; and identification of potential Research Natural Areas for the BLM. Area of Expertise: Landscape ecology; geospatial analysis; watershed and wetland assessment, monitoring and analysis; environmental law and policy.

Linda Vance, Ph.D, Senior Ecologist/Spatial Analysis Lab Director, Montana Natural Heritage Program  
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May 30, 2012  
Sign In Sheet

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